Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for matching user preferences with item characteristics in an electronic database, wherein items are stored in a database along with associated attributes and weights ~~values~~, the database coupled to a processor and an user interface ~~input device~~, the method comprising:

accepting signals from the user interface ~~input device~~ to allow a first user to specify preferences in the form of attributes and weights ~~values~~, the weight associated with a corresponding attribute indicating the level of preference of that attribute to the first user;

accepting signals from the user interface to allow a second user to specify the item characteristics in the form of attributes and weights, the weight associated with a corresponding attribute indicating the level of preference of that attribute to the second user;

adjusting one or more weights of the corresponding attributes associated with the preferences based on a market condition;

adjusting one or more weights of the corresponding attributes associated with the item characteristics based on the market condition; and

using the processor to identify one or more matches by using a weighted comparison among at least one weight ~~value~~ in the preferences and at least one weight ~~value~~ in the item characteristics ~~database~~.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
using a continuous weighting comparison.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
using a discontinuous weighting comparison.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

selecting one of a plurality of functions to be used with the weighted comparison based on the preferences provided by the first user. ~~using a linear weighting comparison.~~

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~1~~4, wherein the plurality of functions include a linear function and a non-linear function.~~further comprising:~~

~~using a non-linear weighting comparison.~~

6. (Canceled)

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of using the processor to identify one or more matches includes substeps of

identifying matches by deriving a value from the weighted comparison, wherein values indicate a range of matches from strong to weak; and

using a condition to identify a match, wherein the condition results in a match being identified where the match is not the strongest match.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the condition includes a consideration of a profit margin in completing a transaction based on the identified match, the method further comprising:

selecting the match that results in the highest profit margin.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

indicating the one or more matches to a user.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

initiating a transaction based on the one or more matches.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein an attribute has multiple selections per attribute.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein items are goods.

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13. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein items are services.

14. (Canceled)

15. (Canceled)

16. (Canceled)

17. (Canceled)

18. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein an attribute is ~~a time attribute representing~~ the time at which an event occurs or the duration of the event.

19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~17~~18, wherein the time attribute has a range of values.

20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein a location attribute is used to indicate location, the method further comprising:

computing the absolute difference between locations specified by first and second location attributes;

using the absolute difference in identifying one or more matches, ~~wherein the absolute difference is treated continuously~~.

21. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein attributes can have continuous values.

22. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~20~~1, wherein an attribute represents education in years.

23. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~20~~1, wherein an attribute represents size.

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24. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~20~~1, wherein an attribute represents weight.

25. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

transforming a first value associated with a first attribute into a second value associated with the first attribute, wherein the second value is used in place of the first value to identify one or more matches by using ~~a~~the weighted comparison, <u>wherein the first value is a continuous or discrete value and the second value is a continuous value</u>.

26. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the <u>first</u> user designates multiple attributes and <u>weights</u> ~~values~~ to specify a preference, <u>wherein the multiple attributes designated by the first user include one or more predefined attributes and one or more attributes designated by the first user on an ad hoc basis; and</u>

<u>wherein the second user designates multiple attributes and weights to specify an item characteristic, wherein the multiple attributes designated by the second user include one or more predefined attributes and one or more attributes designated by the second user on an ad hoc basis</u>.

27. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of using the processor to identify one or more matches includes the step of:

using epsilon complementary slackness to identify the one or more matches.

28. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

performing a subsequent matching operation after removing preferences and characteristics of the one or more identified matches.

29. (Canceled)

30. (Currently Amended) A method for matching user preferences with item characteristics in an electronic database, wherein items are stored in a database along with

associated attributes and values, the database coupled to a processor and user input device, the method comprising:

accepting signals from the user input device to allow a first user to specify preferences in the form of attributes and weights values, the weight associated with a corresponding attribute indicating the level of preference of that attribute to the first user;

accepting signals from the user input device to allow a second user to specify item characteristics in the form of attributes and weights, the weight associated with a corresponding attribute indicating the level of preference of that attribute to the second user;

using the processor to identify one or more matches after performing a step of substituting one or more attributes in either the preferences or the item characteristics or both.

31. (Currently Amended) A method for matching user preferences with item characteristics in an electronic database, wherein items are stored in a database along with associated attributes and values, the database coupled to a processor and an user interface input device, the method comprising:

accepting signals from the user interface input device to allow a first user to specify preferences in the form of attributes and weights values, the weight associated with a corresponding attribute indicating the level of preference of that attribute to the first user;

accepting signals from the user interface to allow a second user to specify item characteristics in the form of attributes and weights, the weight associated with a corresponding attribute indicating the level of preference of that attribute to the second user;

substituting one or more attributes in either the characteristics or the preferences or both; and

subsequent to the step of substituting, performing the step of using the processor to identify one or more matches by using a weighted comparison among at least one weight value in the preferences and at least one weight value in the item characteristics database.